Economic & Political WEEKLY

Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution in India
Author(s): Gail Omvedt
Source: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 6, No. 37 (Sep. 11, 1971), pp. 1969-1979
Published by: Economic and Political Weekly
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4382505
Accessed: 31/10/2014 10:19

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Economic and Political Weekly is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Economic and Political Weekly.*

http://www.jstor.org

This content downloaded from 202.41.10.30 on Fri, 31 Oct 2014 10:19:11 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution in India

Gail Omvedt

It is one of the tragic dilemmas of the colonial situation that the national revolution and the social revolution in a colonial society tend to develop apart from one another. Jyotirao Phule represented a very different set of interests and a very different outlook on India from all the upper caste elite thinkers of the so-called Indian Renaissance who have dominated the awareness of both Indian and foreign intellectuals. The elite expressed an ideology of what may be described as the "national revolution"; it was the nationalism of a class combining bourgeois and high caste traditions. Phule represented the ideology of the social revolution in its earliest form, with a peasant and anti-caste outlook.

Phule's thought represented the fulfilment of the renaissance desire for social transformation along revolutionary lines. He, and not the later elite thinkers, from Ranade through Tilak, should be seen as the primary renaissance figure.

Any culture rests upon a class society and the dominance of a particular class. In India, Hindu culture and the caste system rested upon Brahmanism; hence Phule linked his thought with a movement of opposition to the Brahman elite. "Non-Brahmanism", therefore, represented not simply communalism or a result of British divide-and-rule policies; it represented the first expression of social revolution.

Phule, it is true, failed to provide economic analysis or political organisation appropriate for this struggle. But he had a clear vision of the need for and the basis of a liberation movement.

I

Introduction: The Indian Renaissance

"THE Indian Renaissance", as it is called, represents the efforts of the first generation of Indian thinkers under colonialism to come to grips with the challenge represented by the West and the seeming backwardness of their own society and culture. With ruthless self-criticism, they sought to lay the ground for a total social transformation, to weld science and rationality to Indian culture, to recreate India. Of this generation was Jotirao Phule, and his thought stands forth first as an expression of first generation renaissance thinking.

However, this generation was succeeded by one more concerned with the alien source of new ideas than with the errors of the old society. Perhaps this represented the solidifying of British colonial rule after the middle of the nineteenth century, which ensured the development of a narrowly based elite drawn from the upper (in Maharashtra primarily Brahman) castes, feeding in through the educational system to the British bureaucracy. This was a situation which ensured the status and power of the elite — making them concerned about threats from below to this status — at the same time as it made them restively aware that they were after all serving an alien bureaucracy but as subordinates not rulers within it. Henceforward, however much they spoke of the "Hindu tradition" or the "Indian nation", their thoughts and actions expressed the interests of a class and not a whole people. Hence they opted, as elites do, not for a revolutionary social transformation, but for a "modernisation", in other words a revitalisation, of the old society.

Their identification was as an elite of education and knowledge, as upper castes within the Hindu cultural system, and as modern intellectuals concerned about the scientific and industrial progress of India. Hence they developed an ideology which sought to use a revitalised Hindu tradition as the spiritual and moral centre around which the liberal modernism of the West could be grafted — "Eastern morals and Western science". They accepted the "Aryan theory of race" which had the implications of identifying them ethnically with their British conquerors rather than the majority of their fellow countrymen, which traced civilisation in India from the Aryan conquest, and which gave a new pseudo-scientific justification for the caste hierarchy by linking varna to race. And they developed an economic theory which looked to the capitalist development of India freed from the destructive bonds of British imperialism and therefore opposed foreign exploitation without considering the exploitation of workers by native capitalists or peasants by landlords and the lower bureaucracy.

But the majority of Indians were dark-skinned non-Aryans. The majority of Indians, in traditional varna terms, were Shudras at best. The majority of Indians were peasants and had no hope either in the near or distant future of becoming members of the bureaucratic elite or capitalists, large or small. The liberal modernisation of Hindu culture and the capitalist development of India did not speak to their interests. Peasants, tribals, workers, low-castes, untouchables were all affected (usually adversely) by the new colonial regime and responded, like the elite, with both renaissance and rebellions. But lacking access to education, lacking control over media of communication, their renaissance and their rebellion, their ideology and organisation, remained in a more incipient, crude, localised, and incomplete form. Nevertheless it may be fairly said that with Jotirao Phule the low-caste, non-Aryan, peasant masses of India came to consciousness.

Primary Renaissance Figure

To say that Phule's thought represents an "ideology" is to use the word in a sociological and not a pejorative sense. It is to say that he does not stand alone as an individualistic oddity, that he is not to be studied as an adjunct to all the other social reformers of the nineteenth century; but that he represented a very different set of interests and a very different outlook on India from all the upper caste elite thinkers who have dominated the awareness of both Indian and foreign intellectuals. The elite expressed an ideology of what may be described as the "national revolution", if we define nationalism as opposition to Western colonial rule and remember that it was a nationalism of a class combining bourgeois

This content downloaded from 202.41.10.30 on Fri, 31 Oct 2014 10:19:11 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

and high-caste traditions. Phule represented the ideology of the social revolution in its earliest form, with a peasant and anti-caste outlook which saw its primary enemy as that very elite — and it is, in a sense, one of the tragic dilemmas of the colonial situation that the national revolution and the social revolution in a colonised society tend to develop apart from one another.

Phule's thought represented the fulfilment of the renaissance desire for social transformation along revolutionary lines. In sociological terms it makes good sense that he — and not the later elite thinkers, from Ranade through Tilak — should be seen as the primary renaissance figure. Any culture, after all, rests upon a class society and the dominance of a particular class. Hence the total transformation of culture requires the destruction of this dominance. In terms of India, Hindu culture and the caste system rested upon Brahmanism; hence Phule, who aimed for the complete destruction of caste, superstition and inequality within Indian tradition, linked his thought with a movement of opposition to the Brahman elite. "Non-Brahmanism" in India, therefore, represents not simply communalism or a result of British divide-and-rule policies; it traces its origins to the Indian renaissance and represents the first expression of social revolution in India.

II

The Moral Basis of Society: Revolutionary Values

To comprehend the extent to which Phule's thinking was revolutionary from a cultural point of view, we can note one simple fact: in almost all of his writings, he never uses the term "Hindu". Contrary to practically every other Indian of his day and the vast majority of his followers, he does not take his standpoint from within a valued tradition and seek to locate the essence of it from which other aspects can be criticised. Rather, he takes a stand from without and judges the whole culture in terms of two ruthlessly applied values, rationality and equality. This is not to say that he was speaking as an alien to Indian society; his actions, language and writings show a clear placement among and identification with the masses and their traditions. He does not take a stance outside the *society* but rather one outside the *cultural system* which had for so long dominated that society.

From the point of view of equality, the entire caste system and the authoritarian family structure was to be condemned. From the point of view of rationality, the whole system of superstition and religious traditionalism was to be overthrown, the whole corpus of religious writings stripped of authority. With this as his beginning point, Phule is saved from a good deal of unnecessary arguments, qualifications, compromises and logical inconsistencies. He does not, for instance, waste much breath arguing over the relative merits of different parts of the Hindu sacred scriptures. He simply treats them as legends which may offer *some* insights into past Indian history and as products of a group (Brahmans, Aryans) seeking to establish control over the minds of the people.

Use of Religion

In dismissing totally the dominant religious tradition of India, Phule accepted the assumption that something had to be put in its place: even a revolutionary culture required a moral-religious centre. He does not reject the idea of *dharma* but rather attempts to establish a universalistic one. *"Sarvajanik Satya Dharma"* expresses this concept completely (and the introduction to this book suggests that the appropriate translation might be "True Religion of the Community"): the moral basis of society had to be centred on truth, or rationality, and it had to be one that unified all men and women as equals rather than fragmenting and dividing them into separate social groups with separate responsibilities and rights (as the traditional idea of *dharma* did in separating the castes). The world is seen as good and holy, in contradiction to the Vedantic idea of it as an illusion, because it is God's creation; and God is seen in simple terms as the loving father (or, in the Indian expression which transcends the more patriarchal Semitic concept, as *ma-bap*) of all men who are thus equally valued as his children. This basic concept is used in all Satyashodhak teachings to justify the idea of equality and the assertion that no "middleman" or priest is necessary between man and God.

Because of his missionary education and the Christian influence on his thinking, Phule was accused by his orthodox opponents (until the time when it became politically suicidal for them to do so) of having become Christian. In a metaphorical sense there was some truth to this in that his stance was quite clearly from outside the Hindu tradition. In any other sense it is clearly nonsense. Phule never became a Christian in any institutional form, nor did he show the same concern for the person of Christ that many other Indian social-religious reformers (e g, Keshab Chandra Sen) did. Given the conditions of the time in which Indian Christianity was a colonial dependency, to have converted would have been to give up the game entirely; an Indian Christian became part of another social system and gave up any hope of transforming or redefining *Indian* culture. And this was Phule's overriding concern.

Due to his missionary education, then, and due to sharing the sense which most Indians possessed in that period of cultural and mental turmoil of needing a firm, moral-religious basis for a new society, Phule based his thinking on a concept of God and God's relation to the world which he considered necessary to anchor his passion for rationalism and equality. With that, he left the matter. One may say that he used religion to climb to a point from which a secular, equalitarian society could be built; beyond that his concerns were not religious in any traditional sense of the term.

Passionate Equalitarianism

One aspect of his rationalism can be seen in the Satyashodhak Samaj with its primary emphasis on "truth-seeking". It is most significant here that the truth seeking was seen as a quest guided by the individual's own reason, and not by the dictates of any religious guru or authoritative text. This was important for the development of the Satyashodhak Samaj in that it left it, in a sense, without any centralised organisational form. This was both its strength and its weakness. The movement spread by individual propagandising efforts; it was taken up in spontaneous ways and attained a real village basis in almost all sections of Maharashtra, but it never had an overall controlling body and members complained often of "chaos" within the organisation. Yet even while complaining of the anarchism created by individualism and spontaneity, they recognised that in a sense this organisation was different. Thus, for example, in the first "revived" conference in Poona in 1911, one of the speakers discussing this problem pointed out that while "monarchy" may have worked politically in ancient India, it was a failure in religious organisations and posts such as *guru, acharya, mahant* had been found useless. He therefore urged a steering committee for the Satyashodhak Samaj — and then concluded that the basic unifying factor could only be in terms

This content downloaded from 202.41.10.30 on Fri, 31 Oct 2014 10:19:11 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

of accepting the fundamental *principles* of the organisation.[1] Similarly, the orthodox often charged that the Samaj could not properly be called a religious one since it had no authoritative text, no *dharmagranth* — to which Mukundrao Patil, one of the important later leaders, replied:

> We do not want to have a religious book but to satisfy the intellectual curiosity of the people. Minds should be open to new knowledge. Therefore, we do not recommend any religious book.[2]

In regard to the principle of rationality, the later Satyashodhak organisers remained on the whole true to the conceptions of Phule.

Phule's passionate equalitarianism was an even more crucial issue, one that can be seen at all levels of his thought and actions. It is expressed, for example, in his very language, the terminology of his writings. It is significant that this language shows a ***positive*** identification with some of the social categories considered "low" in the traditional culture. This may be called a kind of equalitarian reversal equivalent to the "black is beautiful" movement among black Americans. Specifically, in referring to the masses of Maharashtra or India, he constantly uses the words "shudra and atishudra". Shudra, of course, is the term by which the dominant brahmanical culture classified those who worked with their hands (including peasants) as part of the lowest order of society. Phule is well aware of the insulting connotation of the term (he states that it is derived from "ksudra" meaning trifling or mean)[3] but he ignores this and continues to insist with a matter-of-fact pride on the use of the term; these, he is saying in effect, *are* the people, the centre of society. He does not show the least desire to "sanskritise" in the way that almost all educated caste leaders did by claiming a kshatriya or other high-varna origin for his or any other caste. He does, it is true, identify "ksatriyas" as the original warriors of India and uses the word frequently, but never as an alternative to "shudra" but rather as inclusive of all original Indians from Kunbi-Marathas through Mahars.

Hostility to 'Maratha' Tradition

Another aspect of his identification with the masses is to note his ambivalence if not downright hostility to what has been called the "Regional Great Tradition" of Maharashtra, that is, the "Maratha" tradition.[4] To give a background, it must be emphasised that although in much of present-day Maharashtra the Kunbi-Maratha distinction has been practically abolished, this was not so in the nineteenth century. "Kunbi" at that time generally referred to the peasant population, "Maratha" to the aristocrats, the *shahanavkuli*, the sardars and their like who still remained a somewhat decadent rentier class. Phule shows no inclination to identify with this Maratha tradition in opposition to the Brahman tradition; he almost never uses the term "Maratha" and when he does so, it is slightingly. The clearest example of this is a conversation he relates with "a so-called pure Maratha":

> Having finshed the second part of *Asud* . . . a gentleman wearing a round Brahman turban came and sat in front of me and began to gaze around the room. Becoming aware of this gentleman, I at first thought he might be a Marwari, but he didn't have the three pigtails hanging down from his turban. I thought he might be a tailor, but there were no needles sticking out of his turban. He might be a goldsmith, but there was no stole over his shoulder. And he might be a Brahman, but I hadn't heard him speak a word. I could not identify his caste from this, so while I was thinking he looked at me and himself asked, "Haven't you recognised me?" I said, "No, sir, I have not, please excuse me." The gentleman said, "I am a Marathi of a Marathi lineage." I — "You may be Marathi but what is your caste?" "My caste is Marathe." I — "In Maharashtra, from Mahars to Brahmans, everyone calls himself a Maratha. So then, it is not clear to me what particular caste you are in." He — "Then you can understand that I am a Kunbi." I — "All right, then, What is your profession?" "Before Appasaheb Maharaj of Satara became infatuated with Bhagubai Tarkshin of Nimbajaval our family easily took one to two lakhs of rupees from him, and we are even today sitting pretty on that."[5]

This conversation shows a subtle taunt regarding the decadence of the aristocrats of the day and their dress; more than that it illustrates Phule's refusal to recognise the legitimacy of "Maratha" as a caste-category and his pressurising the man to admit his *peasant* connections. Phule's attitude toward the Maratha tradition may be summarised by saying that whereas in the Twentieth Century Kunbis had been absorbed into Marathas, he would have preferred to absorb Marathas into Kunbis, the archetypal peasant jati.

Phule's orientation is indeed toward the peasant and his problems. This is graphically shown in his biting and concrete, almost photographic, description of the peasant amidst his poverty, with his meagre food and clothing, harassed by officials and moneylenders. This is heightened by his identification of the peasant as *Baliraja* the traditional Marathi way of expressing the peasant as "lord of the land". Again it must be emphasised that Phule does not see the village leaders only as Baliraja; his orientation is towards the village but a village modernised in terms of equality: the revolution in personal relationships remains central. Unlike many of his colleagues or followers, he almost never refers to the "Patil" or identifies with the interests of the village headman as a foundation of the traditional village community. "Baliraja" in his usage is the peasant, the common man. This is clear in "Gulamgiri" where he describes the Brahmanic tradition as anti-equalitarian (anti-Bali), and traces the growth of nationalism in the West: the English, he writes, learned patriotism from the Greeks but only later learned the importance of the peasant (Bali) and thereby developed a *democratic* nationalism while the American revolution made the common man (Bali) the centre of their society.[6]

Women's Liberation

It is significant that Phule's first practical social reform efforts were involved in aiding the two social groups considered lowest in traditional Brahmanic culture — women and untouchables. He did not do so as a liberal paternalistically concerned for the "uplift" of some lower order of being, but as a radical well aware that a revolution in social relationships had to be founded on community with those most oppressed by the traditional social hierarchy. Untouchables, for example, were seen not as a group unique within India but as the most oppressed section of the masses, part of the original community of the peasants. This is related to Phule's "non-Aryan theory" discussed below; it may be noted here that while later non-Brahmans compared untouchability with Negro slavery, Phule in the book "Gulamgiri" considered peasants and untouchables together as a community of the oppressed, suffering under Brahman slavery. Indeed, it may be said to represent a failure of the Satyashodhak movement when later non-Brahmans identified as caste Hindus separate from untouchables, and untouchables under Ambedkar took their separate path to social liberation.[7]

In regard to the issue of women's liberation, Phule is one of the very few male social reformers in history who deserve a woman's respect. His depth of feeling on the matter was great enough that he was ready to attack one

This content downloaded from 202.41.10.30 on Fri, 31 Oct 2014 10:19:11 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

of his co-workers, Krishnarao Bhalekar. Bhalekar, it seems, had written a severe criticism of a book published by one Tarabai Shinde comparing men and women. Phule replied in 1885 with an attack that was as ferocious and in some ways more bitter than his attack on Brahmans.[8] (It is one indication of the vitality of the Satyashodhak Samaj and the fact that it was not simply a one-man movement but an expression of the needs of an entire group within Indian society, that this rather bitter personal feud of the leaders did not split the movement; Bhalekar remained a leading organiser of the Satyashodhak Samaj until his death in 1910.) Bhalekar was attacked as a representative of the old Indian family system which allowed a free and decadent life to the man while the woman was helplessly bound to the home: the issue was the formation of a new and equalitarian husband-wife relationship; the goal was the breaking down of the old authority structure within the family. Phule seems to have sensed accurately that as long as there was inequality in the family, there could be no true equality in the society. Suppression of women, in traditional Hindu culture, went hand in hand with suppression of low castes and untouchables.

III

Aryans and Non-Aryans: The Problem of Indian National Culture

Phule's ideology, then, was based upon an identification with the peasant masses and an attachment to revolutionary values of equality and rationality. But a complete ideology[9] must contain not only basic values, but also an explanation of the present state or condition of society and a guide to action for change. As a mass ideology, then, Phule's thought expressed not only a drive for abolition of the caste system, but an explanation of how it arose and a theory of exploitation through which all of Indian culture and history were to be understood. Central to this is his "non-Aryan theory", and to pay homage to Phule as a "mahatma" and a "man of the people" without dealing with this theory of exploitation is to refuse to take him seriously.

Two points must be noted here. First, in any society, upper-class ideologies are distinguished from mass ideologies by the fact that they nearly always hold an organic and functionalist view of society, emphasising the reconciliation of opposing interests in the common welfare and the harmonious interaction of the separate parts of society. In contrast, mass ideologies take a polarising view. They focus on exploitation and the irreconcilable conflict of interests between different sections of society; in other words, they contain some doctrine of class conflict.[10]

From this viewpoint, the famous "Indian tendency to the reconciliation of opposites" is not at all a characteristic of the "Hindu mind" but of an elite ideology which sought in varying ways to combine eastern and western traditions and to combine symbols popular with the masses with symbols representative of elite power, regardless of possible contradictions. Phule's thinking does not show any such harmonising tendencies but was based upon the principle that an irreconcilable conflict of interests existed between the Brahman elite and the non-Brahman masses. Because of this, any effort to achieve equality necessitated an attack on the privileges and position of the elite. It makes no more sense to accuse Phule of "hatred of Brahmans" on the grounds of this attack than it does to blame a Marxist for hatred of capitalists.

Focus on Cultural Factors

Second, Phule's theory of exploitation focused on cultural and ethnic factors rather than economic or political ones. It is true that he was highly concerned with the economic and political aspects of exploitation, but (as will be analysed in the following section) the objective conditions of nineteenth century colonialism made it almost impossible to come to an adequate understanding of economic matters or to visualise political solutions. Therefore the cultural and ethnic aspects of mass-elite relationships were emphasised: the elite was seen primarily as Brahmans whose dominant position in the caste system and religiously justified monopoly of knowledge underlay their power; they were seen as aliens, descendants of Aryan invaders who had enslaved and divided the indigenous population by means of the caste system. This approach reflected a good deal of Indian reality, yet it was dangerously susceptible to the position that the acquisition of knowledge and education by the masses (a "revolution in consciousness") and the replacement of a Brahman elite by an elite developed from the non-Brahman masses would be sufficient to achieve an equalitarian society. Therefore, non-Brahman ideology developed after Phule mainly as a "cultural revolutionary" ideology which was never satisfactorily integrated with either the ideology of the national revolution or the ideology of class revolution promoted later by socialists and communists.

Nevertheless, the question of culture was a crucial one, particularly as it related to the problem of nationality, and particularly within the colonial context.

The driving power behind modern imperial expansion has been the development of capitalism, yet colonialism has involved not simply economic exploitation, but also cultural exploitation. It represents not only class domination but (almost by definition) the dominance of whole cultural groups or nationalities—specifically the domination of Asian and African peoples by white European nations. Even the working classes of the dominant nations are in some senses part of a colonial elite; even the bourgeoisie and upper classes of the colonised cultural group are in some senses oppressed. The entire culture of the colonised people (their customs, literature, languages, religions) is downgraded by the colonial rulers and sought to be replaced by Western languages and culture. Therefore an anti-colonial revolution is a national revolution, and involves a reaffirmation and revitalisation of the culture of the dominated nationalities.[10A]

But the problem is more complicated than this. In the West the primary political organisation of the last few centuries has been the creation of the nation-state, the establishment of one sovereign, bureaucratic state based upon a "nationality" or a people unified by culture, language, ethnic identity. In the non-Western world, however, colonialism both held out the nation-state as an ideal and, at the same time, made it practically impossible to achieve. This was because the processes of colonialism have intensified the differences between groups (such as Hindus and Muslims) within a single geographical territory and intensified the worldwide movement of cultural-ethnic groups (Indians to Africa and the West Indies; Africans to the Americas; Chinese throughout South-East Asia) to the point where the resulting "plural society" has made the focus of a state upon a single nationality an impossibility. Colonialism has set up political divisions in many cases without much regard for existing ethnic divisions, and it has intensified the differences between elites and masses (and therefore between elite culture and mass culture) within a single ethnic group.

This content downloaded from 202.41.10.30 on Fri, 31 Oct 2014 10:19:11 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Therefore, if the nation-state is to be the goal of an anti-colonial revolution, the burning question then becomes: what is the nationality, and which is the national culture, that is to be the basis of the new state?

National Culture

When the Indian upper-caste and bourgeois elite dealt with this question, their answer was rather simple. They first accepted the political framework of the British Raj—all of India—as the basis for the state. They then identified the "nation" and the "national culture" as basically Hindu, as deriving from Vedic times, and as fundamentally a creation of the Aryan people. And with this they tended to accept as an inherent part of this culture some form of *varnashramadharma* and to relegate other Indian cultural traditions —non-Aryan, Muslim, tribal, lowcaste, peasant traditions—to a secondary and inferior position.

(This is not to say that there were not genuine secularists among the elite who opposed the injustices of the caste system and Hindu communalism. There were. But they failed to develop their position as a theory of specifically *Indian* culture. The idea of India as a meeting place where different cultures and groups merged did not really come to terms with this issue. Similarly it is interesting to note that the later representatives of the social revolution, that is the Communists, tended to accept the idea that the different linguistic groups within India in fact represented different nationalities, though they quite logically left open the question as to whether this necessitated an autonomous state.)

The elite was helped in their interpretation by the "Aryan theory of race" which was developed in the 1840s and 1850s by German comparative philologists and popularised by Max Muller to emphasise the blood ties between British and Hindus.[11] The Indian elite took up the theory, stressing the ancient superiority of their race and culture and adding that Western Indo-Europeans had lost this in forsaking "Aryan spirituality". Indian civilisation was seen as primarily derivative from Aryan civilisation, and the caste system was lauded as a means by which people of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds were brought together in one society and subjected to the civilising influence of the Aryans. It is somewhat interesting that while Western rationality tended to undercut the old mythological explanations of caste, Western racism at the same time reinforced the system. For the varna divisions were almost automatically reinterpreted in racial terms: the "twice-born" Hindus, Brahmans, kshatriyas and vaishyas, were seen as descendants of Aryan conquerors, while shudras, untouchables and tribals were viewed as basically descendants of the non-Aryan conquered peoples. Even those members of the elite (such as Aurobindo and Swami Dayanand) who rejected the racial aspect of the theory still treated "non-Aryans" — Dravidians, shudras, tribals, Muslims — as inferior in cultural, moral and intellectual terms.[12] And among those who accepted the Aryan theory in its full racial form were the two opposing Maharashtrian Brahman leaders, Tilak and Ranade. Tilak lauded

> the vitality and superiority of the Aryan races, as disclosed by their conquest, by extermination or assimilation, of the non-Aryan races with whom they came in contact in their migrations in search of new lands from the North Pole to the Equator.[13]

And Ranade

> hinted that in India the Aryans were the chosen race and lamented that their chivalrous civilisation had been submerged in the South by "lower" Dravidians and hill tribes and in the North by invading Huns, Jats, and Muslims.[14]

High Caste Symbols

In taking Aryan and Sanskritic culture as the basis of "Indian nationality", the elite was in fact taking a part — the culture of the upper castes and roughly more north Indian groups — for the whole. Indeed, whenever the national elite tried to use Hindu cultural symbols to rally support for militant nationalism, they invariably chose symbols that represented high caste culture and interests. The bhadralok of Bengal, for example, took the mother goddess Kali as their central symbol, and argued that the vaishnavism of the masses had weakened the resistance to foreign rule:

> In a society where the masses of the people were Muslims and Vaishnava Hindus . . . this was an exclusive myth which reduced popular Hindu beliefs to the level of degraded survivals of mediaeval cults and which gave an obvious sanction for continued high-caste Hindu dominance.[15]

In Maharashtra, Tilak and his followers chose first to organise Hindu nationalism around Ganpati, a pre-eminently Brahman deity.[16] Tilak's other choice, Shivaji, was a more universally accepted hero, but here as well a Brahmanical twist was given that provoked many non-Brahmans to anger. In developing the myth of Shivaji as protector of orthodox Hinduism, *go-brahman pratipalak*, the Brahman leaders gave it not only an anti-Muslim bias, but also a pro-Brahman one, and in emphasising the role of Ramdas as guru of Shivaji, they implied that any Maratha king needed Brahman advice to succeed. It was not surprising then, that both the Ganpati festival and the memorialising of Shivaji became centres of Brahman-non-Brahman conflict more than of unified Maharashtrian efforts.[17]

The same limitations held even for Gandhi's great symbol of Hindu nationalism, "Ram-Rajya". Ram is a more widespread figure than either Ganpati or Kali and certainly has a mass basis in the UP-Hindi heartland. Nevertheless for the Tamils he has become a symbol of north Indian conquest, and for many Maharashtrians he represents a ruler whose support of the orthodox caste system involved the killing of a Shudra boy, Shambuka, for the sin of trying to follow a Brahman path to self-improvement.

Phule's Answer

It is in this context of the question of Indian national culture that Phule's writing must be understood.

The predominantly Aryan theory was, first of all, a double-edged sword, and Phule took it up with vigour.[18] So the elite traced their culture, including *varnashramadharma*, from Aryan conquerors — then they were the descendants of foreigners, and their caste system and religion were inventions devised by foreign conquerors to enslave the natives of India. India, and especially Maharashtra, had been ruled by aliens not simply for the centuries of British and Muslim rule, but for thousands of years before that! The masses, from peasants through untouchables and tribals, were the original inhabitants of India, "sons of the soil"; the elites and particularly the Brahmans, the *irani-arya-bhats*, were seen as aliens; the choice between British and Congress elite rule was seen as the choice between an enlightened and a traditional set of foreigners. Upper caste, orthodox religion and the whole culture of the sacred books, from the Vedas through the Puranas, was seen by Phule not simply as superstition, but also as alien and a weapon of rule.

The sacred religious literature was reinterpreted to show how the invading Aryans had conquered the indigenous people through force, treachery and use of religious propaganda. The nine avatars of Vishnu were seen as different stages of the Aryan conquest. Matsya (the fish) and Kaccha (the tortoise) re-

This content downloaded from 202.41.10.30 on Fri, 31 Oct 2014 10:19:11 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

presented invasion by sea; Varah (the boar) was so-called because the original Aryans were seen as barbarians by the more civilised native kshatriyas. The story of Narsinh (the man-lion) and Prahlad represented conquest by treachery and propaganda, where the mind of a local prince was corrupted to the point where he was willing to kill his own father. Finally Waman (the brahman boy) represented a kind of culmination of the Aryan conquest of Maharashtra by cheating the great Bali out of his kingdom. Not so much attention was given to the later avatars, Parashuram, Krishna, or Rama,[19] but the approach was clear. The "dasyus" or non-Aryans and the demons of the Vedas and Puranas represented the indigenous population and were depicted as enlightened kings and warriors, the Aryans and their gods as treacherous invaders.

The culmination of interpretation was Phule's emphasis on Bali-Raja, king Bali. This symbol was in a sense his reply to the elite's use of Ram, Ganpati or Kali; it was a symbol that united the Maharashtrian peasant masses with the tales of Aryan invasions. Bali, as has been noted, is an ancient and valued symbol for the peasant and at the same time represents a sort of golden age, expressed in the Marathi saying, "let sorrow and unhappiness go, let the kingdom of Bali come!" Bali's kingdom in addition serves for Phule as a focus around which positive interpretations of other peasant deities of Maharashtra are elaborated. That is, while Phule remained a rationalist and did not attempt to foster religious revivalism, at the same time he has a favourable approach to such peasant and low-caste deities as Khandoba, Jotiba, Martand, Kalbhairi, that contrasts with his hostility to Sanskritic deities. Khandoba, for instance, is derived from the title of the official in charge of each of the nine "khands" or parts of Bali's kingdom; Mhasoba from "mahasubha" or great province, and so on.

Mass Nationalist Ideology

The purpose of this interpretation was not so much to provide a full history of India as to give a viewpoint from which such a history could be understood, to develop a nationalist ideology from a mass point of view. The purpose of the "non-Aryan" theory is to establish a cultural and racial basis for the unity of the Maharashtrian masses. This was a unity that more or less excluded Brahmans but did positively identify the peasant majority (that is, the middle level castes of Kunbis, Malis, Dhangars, etc) with untouchables and tribals as one community, native inhabitants of Maharashtra. While Phule did not write in terms of "Dravidians" or try to theoretically establish a Maratha regional nationalism, his approach nevertheless pointed in the same direction as the theories developed later in the context of the non-Brahman movement of Madras.

The non-Aryan theory, however, has proved somewhat of an embarrassment to many of Phule's later Maharashtrian followers, for two reasons. First, the whole idea of ethnic conflict between Aryans and non-Aryans has been de-emphasised, not only because the question of actual racial mixing was recognised as a complex one, but also because of a need to assert a Hindu national unity. Second, the middle castes of Maharashtra, in the caste conferences of the twentieth century and under the impetus of their educated and rich leaders, chose instead to identify themselves as kshatriyas, and with this as basically of Aryan or northern descent. Phule's approach, therefore, came to be ignored and dismissed with the statement that he was not, after all, a historian; the concepts of "slavery", "shudra", "non-Aryan" came to be applied primarily to untouchables and tribals; and many modern Maharashtrian non-Brahmans have accepted the general north Indian identification of DMK ideology as "racist".

However, the issue was not basically a racial one, but a cultural one, a matter of group identity. As has been noted, even the nineteenth century national leaders who argued that "Aryan and non-Aryan" did not represent a racial division still accepted the inferiority of non-Aryans. Similarly, the Twentieth Century representatives of "Hindu nationalism" argue for the racial unity of all Hindus but at the same time assert that the centre of this "Hindu culture" is Vedic, i e, Aryan, upper caste.[20] Under the assertion of unity the problems of divisions and hierarchy continue to be fostered.

In fact, there are varying cultural traditions in India as well as complicated racial intermixtures. The question of what is to be seen as the centre of the "national culture" — or of the culture of any Indian state — remains crucial. If the emphasis is towards Sanskritic Hinduism, Vedic culture, vedanta philosophy, Mahabharata and Ramayana stories, this implies a bias that is *socially* in favour of the upper castes and towards indirect support of the caste system, and *geographically* in favour of north India. If the emphasis is towards non-Vedic culture, towards peasant traditions and tribal traditions, towards traditions of religious revolt running through Buddhism and the bhakti cults, then the bias is socially in favour of the "masses" and geographically in favour of the outlying linguistic regions of India. In scholarship and nationalist thinking, the bias up to now has been towards a Sanskritic, and therefore elite, basis to Indian culture, but in fact non-Sanskritic traditions have as much claim to an all-India spread.

(Scholars, it may be noted, have reflected this bias when they identified the Indian "Great Tradition" with Sanskritic elements and characterised opposing elements as part of a localised "Little Tradition". In some senses however the non-Aryan traditions could be called more of a "great tradition". For example, a recent study of the spread of Ramayana stories throughout South-East Asia notes that non-Brahman, non-Aryan versions which characterise Ravana in heroic terms — essentially akin to DMK versions — which have had a basis in south India as well as Bengal and Kashmir, are in fact more widely favoured in South-East Asia than versions favouring Rama.[21])

Non-Aryan Version

In fact, the whole question of Indian cultural identity may be said to be still an open one, in the process of formation in the context of social struggles. Phule's "non-Aryan" version of Maharashtrian identity, then, remains still extremely relevant.

Tamil Nadu represents of course one section of India where the issue has been decided in favour of a non-Aryan national culture as a result of a non-Brahman movement much akin to the movement in Maharashtra. Maharashtra has developed no such nationalism, yet in some ways it remains a more crucial and open case. While in Madras Tamil language and literature as well as its extreme southern location provided an unambiguous foundation for a non-Aryan identification, in Maharashtra the choice between "non-Aryan" and "Aryan" has been, to a much greater degree, a choice between elite and mass cultural traditions. Thus Brahmans, especially Chitpavans, could be unambiguously characterised as non-natives; and untouchables and tribals as non-Aryan natives. But there is a wide range of middle castes whose position is more ambiguous. (This ambiguity can be traced in later non-Brahman thinking; for instance in "*Marathe ani Tyanci Bhasha*", Bhaskarrao Jadhav shows on the

This content downloaded from 202.41.10.30 on Fri, 31 Oct 2014 10:19:11 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

one hand the prevalence of Dravidian customs and racial intermixture among Marathas, and on the other asserts, without any qualification, the Marathas are definitely "Aryan Kshatriyas").[22] For such castes to emphasise an Aryan and kshatriya identity is to express a high status and a belongingness to northern and Vedic traditions that separates them from the low castes and untouchables of Maharashtra. It is no accident that this type of ideologising became dominant at the time when the non-Brahman movement was splitting into the untouchable upsurge led by Ambedkar and a drive of caste Hindus (primarily Marathas) for political power. On the other hand, when Phule chose to emphasise the "non-Aryan" identity of the majority peasant castes of Maharashtra, he was rejecting elite and aristocratic traditions and asserting their unity with low castes, untouchables, and tribals. (He was also, it may be noted, asserting a unity with other oppressed peoples throughout the world; it is no accident that in dedicating *Gulamgiri* to the abolition of slavery in the United States he was one of the few men of his time to identify with black Americans.)

It is no wonder, then, that Phule's interpretations of the Aryan-non-Aryan conflict recur in practically all of his writings. This theory was central to his concept of the exploitation of the masses, it provided a concrete basis upon which the caste system could be attacked as non-Indian, and it provided the foundations upon which a theory of Maharashtrian "democratic national culture" could be built. Even if his later followers did not choose to erect the building, the foundation remains; the question of identity and culture remains unresolved.

IV

Economic and Political Dilemmas

Because thought reflects social reality, not only do the elements of a particular ideology reflect the interests of a particular class or group within society, but the degree of sophistication, the development of theory also reflects the organisational and institutional development of these classes. In analysing Phule's economic and political views, it is necessary not only to consider the conflicts of interests between the largely Brahman, bureaucratic elite, but also the specific problems of mass organisational development in a colonial situation.

By the last half of the nineteenth century the Indian elite had reached a position where they could meet their Western rulers on something near equal terms in developing social theory and a "political economy" from an Indian point of view.[23] Western education, the formation of new associations, newspapers and journals, the beginnings of political organisations, all provided a basis of social institutions around which thinking could be developed, theories tested and exchanged. This was hardly possible for the colonial masses, whose organisational and ideological weakness relative to their own elite was much more marked than in Western industrial nations. Even workers could hardly form their own organisations or deal with their employers and the government without the mediation of literate and English-knowing outsiders; for the peasants, who formed the vast majority, autonomous organisation was impossible. They were in the position of being affected by the vagaries of a world-wide capitalist system while possessing only traditional institutions with which to cope with it. Thus peasant rebellions might occur, but organisational forms could not be maintained.

The same was true in the field of ideology. Here it was necessary not only to be literate, but to be literate in a foreign language in order to utilise the most advanced thinking for the understanding of the causes and remedies of the poverty of the Indian masses. (And this was necessary because in fact colonialism established an organic connection between the "backwardness" of non-Western peasants and the "development" of the West.) But few people of "mass" origin got any form of education; the tendency was for even these to be co-opted by the Brahmanised elite and to yield to the class status their education made possible; non-Brahman organisational and institutional development was slow — two or three newspapers by the end of the century could provide only a small basis for exchange and development of ideas. Thus, however much a "peasant" or "mass" viewpoint might exist, however strong the contacts of non-Brahman leaders were with the masses, the social institutional basis for developing this into a sophisticated theoretical analysis did not exist.

Designed to Shock

The work of Jotirao Phule and his colleagues has to be understood in this context. Phule's own writings reflect the sporadic nature of non-Brahman organisational development: they are unsystematic, sporadic, pictorial rather than discursive, hard-hitting but designed more to shock people into an awareness of the situation than to provide an extensive analysis. As he notes in the introduction to *"Sarvajanik Satya Dharma"*, he had wanted to write a more thorough book but felt it was more important for the book to be useful to the daily life of the people. Non-Brahman leaders in general thought it was more important to speak to the masses than to engage in finely spun analysis. Thus Phule is not so much involved with providing economic and political theory or writing Indian history as with giving a viewpoint, a beginning, a foundation. He therefore has to be understood as a forerunner.

Yet his writings include not only heart-rending descriptions of peasant poverty, not only poetry and propaganda aimed at mass organising, but also discussions of the causes and remedies of such poverty. These are not systematic, but they contain a certain basic logic, and they reflect the dilemmas of the Indian masses of the time. Further, since both the weaknesses as well as the strengths of Phule's outlook became part of the general heritage of the non-Brahman movement, it is important to understand his position.

Phule's economic outlook might be summarised by saying that while the Indian nationalist elite developed a theory of Indian backwardness as a result of colonial exploitation, Phule and his colleagues saw the peasant masses as toiling under a double exploitation — that of the Brahman elite as well as that of the colonial rulers. And while the elite viewed industrialisation as the primary solution to Indian problems and took their stand with the emerging capitalist class, Phule focused on the problems of agriculture and spoke from the viewpoint of the peasant.[24]

It is interesting to note that Phule repeated much of the nationalists' economic critique of British rule. Unlike some of the later non-Brahman leaders who maintained an unqualified loyalty to the Raj, he seems to have seen it as largely destructive in economic terms; it was only on cultural and social grounds that he viewed it as providing a foundation for the liberation of the masses. Thus he linked peasant poverty to the ruin of Indian crafts and artisans by unfair competition with British goods, to the disastrous growth of population, to home charges and the expense of foreign campaigns, to excessive spending on fat salaries for bureaucrats. He described with scorn the decadent life-style of British officials and

This content downloaded from 202.41.10.30 on Fri, 31 Oct 2014 10:19:11 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

their neglect of the peasants, and noted that even the common British soldier lived like an aristocrat at the expense of the masses. Like the nationalists, he viewed the "bureaucracy" as the primary enemy of the peasants — but where he differed from the nationalists was in seeing the bureaucracy as a whole, led at the top by the British but dominated at all other levels by the native Brahman elite. In fact, one of his major criticisms of the British was that in leading their pleasure-seeking life they acquiesced in Brahman dominance of the masses. In every department, education, irrigation, the judiciary, etc, the Brahmans were seen as monopolising the benefits of rule. In particular, the exploitation of the peasants by the incompetent, corrupt, wilfully alienated judiciary was heavily attacked. While the nationalists criticised the "drain" of income from India to England, Phule and his colleagues directed their attention to the "drain" from the peasantry to the urban-based bureaucratic elite, and criticised heavily such taxes as the octroi, which provided a major amount of municipality income, and the local fund, by means of which largely upper-caste students were educated at the expense of the peasantry.

Primary Conflict

The primary economic conflict within India was thus described as a conflict between the peasantry and the elite-dominated bureaucracy. Zamindars or inamdars in this area of ryotwari settlement were more or less viewed as irrelevant. Shetjis and bhatjis were coupled, later, as enemies of the peasants, but antagonism was always greater against bhatjis. Shetjis or moneylenders oppressed the peasant through indebtedness but it was felt they could only gain power as a result of the support they got from the Brahman-dominated bureaucracies. Brahmans or bhatjis were often landlords and moneylenders themselves; through religious domination they kept the peasant ignorant and subjugated; and finally they had social and family ties all up and down the bureaucratic hierarchy. It was this bureaucracy that was the source of power, and at its bottom, linking it with the village, was the Brahman kulkarni, whose power over the ignorant peasantry provided the linchpin of exploitation.

Phule did not give any consideration to the issue of economic differentiation *within* the peasantry, to class differences of rich and poor peasants, small landholders and agricultural labour; the whole problem of property and the organisation of the relations of production was absent from his thought. In one sense he cannot be faulted for this, since it was not until the Twentieth Century and particularly till the time of Mao that Marxists themselves elaborated a theory of class differentiation among the peasantry relevant to revolutionary development in rural areas. However, it can be noted that Phule's thought was in some ways pre-industrial. For example, although his own colleague Narayanrao Lokhande was one of the very first Indian spokesmen for labour, still the problems of industry and the working class did not enter into Phule's thinking in a theoretical form. This absence was symptomatic of the general failure to link the "cultural revolutionary" tradition of the Satyashodhak Samaj and the non-Brahman movement to the "economic revolutionary" outlook of Marxism—Phule himself was definitely revolutionary in seeing an irreconcilable conflict of interests between the masses and the elite and feeling that a complete change of the social system and the overthrow of a dominating class would be necessary for mass progress; yet this was not linked to a direct class conflict — of which the class conflict of factory labour and their employers provided the clearest paradigm — but more to issues of the caste society.

Industrialisation was not seen by Phule as a solution to Indian backwardness. In a primarily agricultural country, he felt, the remedy for mass poverty lay in a direct solution of the agrarian problem. Thus he urged extensive action by the government for the improvement of agriculture, including soil conservation schemes; the construction of tanks, bunds and dams; scientific programmes of animal breeding; the specific education of peasants to create a class of instructors to teach modern techniques of agriculture within each village, and so forth. This was consistent with his general opposition to "trickle-down" theories of progress—that is, he did not feel that economic or educational benefits to a small section would eventually result in overall social progress (hence his insistence on *mass* education). This general outlook has been justified in that industrial development in many capitalist underdeveloped countries has only increased contradictions between rich and poor sections. However, perhaps because of his lack of concern for economic differentiation among the peasantry, he did not foresee that even the benefits of agricultural development might not easily flow from a rural elite to the rural masses.[25]

These limitations of Phule's thinking are of course related to nineteenth century conditions: industrialisation had scarcely begun, the working class was as yet insignificant, agricultural development had not provided a solid basis for a rich peasant class to emerge. All of these were in a real way problems for his followers, for later non-Brahman leaders to cope with; and to cope with them they would have had to take Phule's basic viewpoint—a lively awareness of exploitation and a concern for equality and direct mass development—as a foundation for a full analysis that would transcend Phule's own. But this was, on the whole, not done.

Insoluble Problem

Politically, Phule's view of the double exploitation of the peasantry left him with an almost insoluble problem. How could an unorganised, illiterate and still mentally-enslaved peasantry fight two enemies at once? It was not simply that the Sarvajanik Sabha and the National Congress of Phule's time were overwhelmingly dominated by the Brahman elite; it was also that he could not visualise the possibility of *any* freedom movement, in his time or the future, that would not come under elite organisational control. And to a large degree this was a realistic assessment. Even in the Twentieth Century periods of mass mobilisation (such as the 1939 Civil Disobedience Campaign and the 1942 Quit India Movement) that drew in extensive mass participation and peasant leadership were followed by periods of organisation consolidation that saw the re-establishment of upper class control. Non-Brahman entry into the Congress coincided with the disappearance of the Satyashodhak Samaj, yet non-Brahman leaders did not gain control of the Congress organisation until Independence. By this time the fervour of social reform and cultural revolution had been lost.

Therefore, in the choice between British rule and Brahman organisational dominance, Phule opted for British rule as the best guarantee of the conditions under which the masses could progress. In one sense he had no other choice (and he was after all no simple supporter of the British; for instance, in 1880 he was the only member of the Poona Municipality to oppose the spending of Rs 1,000 for the

This content downloaded from 202.41.10.30 on Fri, 31 Oct 2014 10:19:11 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Viceroy's visit[26]). In another sense this reflected a failure in his analysis, a yielding to the illusion of beneficence which the British put forth. He was perfectly aware of the continuance of Brahman power under British rule —this was his major complaint—yet he never linked this to an analysis of colonialism as a system that depended on such intermediary elites to maintain itself. Therefore he was caught in the position of asking the British to institute changes which, as a colonial government, they had neither the will nor the power to carry out.

Consider for a moment the demands he was making. He wanted mass education rather than elite "trickle down" education. But the British did not have the financial resources nor the desire to carry this out; no colonial power did, and the very purpose of colonial education was to train the intermediary elite of bureaucrats whom Phule opposed. He wanted British civil servants and investigatory commissions to heed the testimony of mass representatives rather than the elite; but he was more aware than any nationalist leader that however much the British pretended to be protectors of the peasants, however much they distrusted the educated elite, in fact they were far removed from any sharing of interests or life with the masses. He was asking an impossibility.

Petitioning the British

Phule wanted sweeping social changes within village society itself. His primary goal was not simply to replace a Brahman-dominated bureaucracy with a non-Brahman bureaucracy over the villages and it was not simply to transfer power to the villages. Rather he wanted to revolutionise village society itself. Not only should the position of kulkarni be abolished; but also the patil's and other watan posts should be opened up to all on the basis of merit through special training schools.[27] Thus the entire watan system with its relationship to traditional caste privileges and functions was to be destroyed along with the hereditary linking of caste and occupation. Similarly, the traditional moral and social life of the masses had to be drastically reformed. Phule urged a strong legislation of morality that would prohibit bigamy and child marriage and concealed prostitution in the form of kolhatins and tamashas. The equality of women, as well as the equality of untouchables, demanded sweeping changes at the basis of society.

But what type of government would carry through such sweeping changes? Such a programme, even though it did not directly refer to economic inequalities within the village, nevertheless involved a revolutionary attack on traditional social arrangements. Therefore it projected a revolutionary state. It required a type of political organisation that was as far removed from the capitalist or colonial *laissez-faire* state as it was from traditional government by caste and social custom.

The British were after all by policy reluctant to attack the traditional customs of Indian society. They were, further, unwilling to attack seriously the privileges of the elite because they depended on this elite for maintenance of the Raj; in a colonial situation the relation of Western rulers with the native elite is an ambiguous one that involves not only a conflict of interests but also compromise, a sharing of power.[28] The problem was not simply that Phule was petitioning the government for reforms — the style of the Brahman nationalist elite in this period was also one of petitioning, of compromise and negotiation. The Congress was by no means a revolutionary body. But there was an important difference between petitioning for elite reforms and mass demands. Elite reforms could be conceded by the British after a process of agitation and compromise (and even in the nineteenth century there were British statesmen such as Macaulay who approved the idea of the end of direct colonial rule on the grounds that a "neo-colonial" regime in which Indians had political self-rule but continued to be economically linked to the West as consumers of English goods would accord more with British interests). But the mass demands for sweeping social revolution, heavy expenditure on educational and agricultural development, could not be conceded. Phule's petitioning was therefore contradictory in a way that elite petitioning was not.

The basic goal was revolutionary changes at the base of society. If the British could not carry them out, who would? Phule's other attempt to provide a solution was to look to the development of a non-Brahman elite who would implement such changes. Brahman positions, he argued, should be limited to their percentage of the population and non-Brahmans should be associated with the government at all levels. This was not seen as an end, but as a means. It was based on the belief that a non-Brahman educated elite would continue to have family and cultural ties with the masses that would limit their ability and willingness to exploit them as the Brahmans did.[28A] Yet Phule was aware that educated non-Brahmans of his day also tended to be co-opted into acceptance of the caste hierarchy and "Brahmanic" values and that they were susceptible to nationalistic appeals for unity with the elite rather than with the peasant masses against the elite. What would insure that this would not happen on a larger scale? This question was never satisfactorily answered.

Cultural Revolutionary Stance

The contradictions in the economic and political programme of Phule and his colleagues were in fact inherent in the condition of a peasantry under colonial rule. But they were transmitted as part of a heritage of a developing "non-Brahman movement" that did represent the social revolutionary drive of the Maharashtrian masses. Phule's greatest contribution was in his rigourous cultural revolutionary stance, his drive for equality and rationality, and in the creation of an organisation, the Satyashodhak Samaj, which would carry on agitation for social and religious reform at a mass level. However, his followers remained unable to coordinate this cultural revolution with a consistent economic and political revolutionary programme. Faced by a situation where the colonial government could not and would not carry out a programme of social revolution and where an elite-dominated national movement wanted to arouse mass participation without letting it get out of control (no-tax agitations, for instance, were invariably halted when they threatened to turn into no-rent agitations), leaders of the non-Brahman movement never managed to create an organisation to oppose both independence of both government and elite. In such a situation they yielded to the temptation to focus on the means (the creation of a non-Brahman elite drawn from village society) to the exclusion of the end (the transformation of village society itself).

Thus in the legislative councils non-Brahman leaders sought to achieve the opening up of bureaucratic positions to non-Brahmans, to hasten the process of transforming the watandar kulkarni into a talathi, and to destroy the hereditary rights of the village priest or joshi. At the same time they sponsored patil conferences and resisted the attempts of Ambedkar to abolish the

This content downloaded from 202.41.10.30 on Fri, 31 Oct 2014 10:19:11 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

mahar watan. Phule's concern for a revolution of equality in personal relationships — between men and women, among the different castes, within village and family itself — tended to be neglected. The result was that the shift of power toward rural society meant a shift to an unrevolutionised village dominated by a rural elite. Thus the educational institutions founded by non-Brahman leaders and the agricultural co-operatives which had their beginnings in this period began to provide an institutional basis for the consolidation of the power of this elite.[29]

In this situation, the non-Brahman movement was merged with the national movement, but the former Satyashodhak leaders never succeeded in transforming the national revolution to a social revolution. The militant younger non-Brahmans, turning to nationalism, accused the loyalist non-Brahman leadership of giving up social revolutionary goals in exchange for elite positions under the British; but they themselves neglected these goals in the process of mass mobilisation and acquisition of power within the Congress organisation. Phule's overriding concern for social revolution and the awareness of the inherent conflict between the exploited masses and the educated and wealthy elite was compromised as non-Brahmans began to form a significant part of that elite.

V

Conclusions

Can it be said, then, that the ideology of the Satyashodhak Samaj was simply an ideology of a "rich peasant" class, of a section of the masses in their drive for participation in power? The answer is no — basically because important parts of Phule's thinking disappeared precisely as the rural elite came to power. Thus the emphasis on a "non-Aryan" cultural and ethnic unity of all the masses from Kunbi-Maratha peasants to untouchables was given up, and the Satyashodhak Samaj vanished as a vital force in village society after 1930. Phule's influence and the work of Satyashodhakas played a crucial role in giving birth to the most vital movement of untouchables in all of India — but this movement, while retaining the urge to overthrow Brahmanism and casteism, became separated from that of caste Hindu non-Brahmans. After the disappearance of the Satyashodhak Samaj, there remained no rural organisation that succeeded in uniting men and women from all non-Brahman castes in a drive for social reform. The thought of Phule remains a part of the Maharashtrian tradition, but its cultural revolutionary drive has been dispersed and fragmented, still unrealised — reflecting perhaps the still fragmented and unorganised poverty of the rural masses.

The thought of Jotirao Phule was revolutionary; it gave a clearer goal for individual freedom and self-fulfilment, complete inequality and social unity than any other "reformist" thinking of the time; it called for a revolutionary, ruthless attack on the injustice of the old society. It was no accident that this drive for liberation was linked with a "non-Aryan" theory that sought to give a cultural and ethnic foundation for the unity of the masses. The Aryan theory of the elite identified them, in a significant way, with the white races of the world; while Phule was the first Indian to identify with the oppression of American Red Indians and American Blacks. In this era of world history, which is still the era of industrial capitalism and its associate imperialism, the road to equality and freedom on a world-wide scale appears to lie *via* the liberation struggles of non-white peoples, whether this be in America, the archetypal Western nation, or in India, the archetypal non-Western nation. Phule failed to provide economic analysis or political organisation appropriate for this struggle, but he had a clear vision of the need for and the basis of a liberation movement. It remains to his modern followers to take up the challenge.

[This paper is, in a sense, a prelude to my doctoral dissertation for the PhD in Sociology, "Cultural Revolution in Maharashtra: the non-Brahman Movement and Satyashodhak Samaj, 1910-1930". It is based almost completely upon Phule's own writings and on my general sociological knowledge. I regret that due to my inadequate knowledge of Marathi I was not able to use much of the secondary literature on Phule and his works. Dhananjay Keer's English biography has thus provided me with most of the background on the life of Phule. For help in translation and interpretation of Phule's writings and for many stimulating discussions of these I owe thanks to R M Bapat of Poona University.

However, for help in my general dissertation work, for providing valuable information and discussion of the non-Brahman movement, and for help in understanding Phule's cultural revolutionary viewpoint, I owe thanks to all the Satyashodhak workers and non-Brahman leaders who have so generously given me their time. Their names are too numerous to mention here. Special thanks, however must be given to those who have preserved by their own efforts the literature of the movement. I am grateful to Madhavrao Mukundrao Patil and R M Patil for the maintenance of *Din Mitra,* to Madhavrao Shripatro Shinde for *Vijayi Maratha;* to Shamrao Desai for *Rashtravir;* to Ganpatrao Jadhav for *Kaivari;* to D S Zhodge, K K Savant, Appasaheb Jadhav, Prataprao V Shinde and many others for allowing me use of a wide variety of pamphlets, books and literature. Finally, special mention must by made of Gopinatrao Eknath Palkar for the preservation of much valuable material, including *Din Bandhu,* the *Deccan Rayat,* and the Satyashodhak Samaj conference reports. Without such material and help provided, social history cannot be written. If in the past biases have entered into the writing of Maharashtrian social history, it is partly due to the insufficient use of such material. It is to be hoped that with the new interest developing in the history of the *bahujan samaj* that can be seen with the establishment of such institutions as Shahu Institute of Shivaji University, these valuable newspapers and booklets can be preserved in permanent form for future students.]

Notes

1 Reported in *Din Mitra,* May 24, 1911.
2 *Din Mitra,* January 31, 1912.
3 *"Gulamgiri"* p 119. Citations from Phule are from the Government edition of his works *"Mahatma Phule: Samagrh Vangmay"*, ed Dhananjay Keer and S G Malshe.
4 See Henry Orenstein "The Concept of 'Maratha' in Maharashtra", *Eastern Anthropologist,* ca 1951.
5 Appendix to *"Shetkaryaca Asud"*, p 236.
6 *"Gulamgiri"*, pp 135-6.
7 It may be noted that many Buddhists today view their movement as the true realisation of the Satyashodhak Samaj: "Caste Hindus gave up Brahmans but not Brahmanism".
8 *Sataar* No 2, pp 281-88.
9 Ideology is used here in the general sociological sense to refer to a system of thought supportive of the interests of a particular group or class. Two more specialised definitions might be noted: Karl Mannheim, in "Ideology and Utopia", uses "ideology" only for a system of thought seeking to change society, while reserving the term "utopia" for an upper class ideology which seeks to maintain the *status quo.* Reinhard Bendix and Franz Schurmann would reserve the term "ideology" for systems of thought of an industrial era, linked to organisations seeking to change society with the help of a rational and secular analysis; see Schurmann, "Ideology and Organisation in Communist China" (University of California Press, 1968)
10 Stanislaw Ossowski, "Class Structure in the Social Consciousness".

This content downloaded from 202.41.10.30 on Fri, 31 Oct 2014 10:19:11 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

11 Joan Leopold, "The Aryan Theory of Race", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, June 1970, pp 271-2.
12 *Ibid*, pp 281-3.
13 *Ibid*, p 274.
14 *Ibid*, p 281. In "Rise of the Maratha Power", on the other hand. Ranade tended to stress that Maharashtra had been the meeting place of the best of both Aryan and Dravidian cultures, but still treated this in terms of the caste hierarchy, with "shudras" considered of Dravidian descent, Brahmans, etc, Aryan.
15 John Broomfield, "Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal", pp 16-17.
16 G S Ghurye, "Gods and Men", pp 91-2, 114-139.
17 For discussion of the Ganeshutsava, see Richard Cashman, "The Political Recruitment of the God Ganpati", in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, September 1970, and my paper, "The non-Brahman Challenge in Poona." The conflict over Shivaji was rampant throughout the period of the non-Brahman movement.
18 The following is drawn mostly from "*Gulamgiri*" but the themes appear in almost every one of Phule's books.
19 Parashurama became the central figure in the more purely kshatriya ideology which developed as an upper class version of non-Brahmanism and was frequently considered to represent a "civil war" among the Aryans themselves. The story of Ram and Ravana, of course, was crucial to the Tamil interpretations of north Indian invasions.
20 See Golwalkar, "A Bunch of Thoughts", and Balraj Madhok, "Indianisation", esp page 16 where he says that Vedic culture represents the "substratum" of Indian culture much as white English culture provides the "substratum" of society in the USA. Phule as well as black Americans might agree but see in this a call for revolution in both cases.
21 Santosh Desai, "Ramayana — an Instrument of Historical Contact and Cultural Transition between India and Asia", *Journal of Asian Studies*, November 1970.
22 "*Marathe and Tyanci Bhasha*" (Kolhapur, 1932), p 9 and elsewhere.
23 For the most thorough study of the elite and its economic thinking, see Bipin Chandra, "The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India".
24 Except where otherwise noted, most references on political and economic questions are from "*Shetkaryaca Asud*".
25 For a discussion of this issue by a sociologist see W F Wertheim, "Betting on the Strong", in A R Desai, "Rural Sociology in India".
26 M G Mangudkar, "*Poona Nagarsanstha Shatabdi Granth*", pp 504-5.
27 "*Gulamgiri*", p 128.
28 For a study of this aspect with reference to India see Anil Seal, "The Emergence of the Indian Elite".
29 "*Shetkaryaca Asud*", pp 237-8.
30 See Ian Catanach, "Rural Credit in Western India", for a discussion of the laying of the foundations of co-operatives in this period. Satyashodhak and non-Brahman attention was focused on these from the beginning.

Competitiveness of Indian Steel Exports

A Comment

S A Dave

S K Subramanian

IN a very interesting article ("Competitiveness of Indian Steel Exports" May 29, 1971) Samuel Paul has suggested criteria to judge the export competitiveness of products both in the short run and in the long run. The export competiveness of a product, according to Samuel Paul, should be determined by the domestic cost involved per unit of foreign exchange earned. All products can be ranked according to the value of this ratio and the product with the highest ratio, from the exporting country's point of view, would be regarded as the most competitive exportable product.

We agree with Paul that the basic rational of these criteria has to be in terms of the domestic cost incurred per unit of foreign exchange earned. But we feel that Paul has failed to take into account some important factors. As a consequence, Paul's criteria seem to us somewhat oversimplified. We will illustrate our arguments with reference, first, to the long term criterion and then to the short term criterion of Paul.

For a product "i", Paul has defined the criterion of domestic resource cost per unit of foreign exchange earned (D_i) as:

$$D_i = \frac{\sum_j X_{ji} + d_i + w_i + r_i}{F_i - (m'_i + m''_i)} \quad .. \quad (1)$$

Where X_{ji} = value of indigenous, non-exportable inputs supplied from the jth industry (net of indirect taxes) for the manufacture of one unit of the ith item less the value of imported inputs required by X_{ji}
d_i = depreciation charges per unit of product i
w_i = wages per unit of i
r_i = return on investment per unit of i
F_i = FOB foreign exchange receipt per unit of i
m'_i = CIF value of imported inputs (direct and indirect) per unit of i
m''_i = FOB value of exportable inputs per unit of i

The numerator in the above ratio is the sum of the value added by manufacture and the cost of non-exportable (non-traded) inputs. Wages and the return on investment are to be valued at social cost. Paul is quite aware of the difficulties involved in assessing these two factors at social cost, but he would prefer to evaluate them at their social cost. We have some reservations regarding the use of shadow prices, particularly of labour, but we need not dwell on that point here.

Liberal Criterion

The denominator, as defined by Paul, is not sufficiently comprehensive of all foreign exchange costs. As in the case of the numerator, there should be charge on foreign capital as well as depreciation on foreign capital. At the time of import of this capital, the country had an option of import or investment in securities of foreign governments or in any high-yielding projects abroad. These investments would have yielded some returns in foreign exchange. By choosing the alternative of importing capital goods, the country is deprived of the foreign exchange that could have been available over time because of investment abroad. The charge on capital, therefore, should be considered the true foreign exchange cost to the economy.

Depreciation on foreign capital, as in case of any capital, should be part of the cost. Whether it should be treated as domestic cost or foreign exchange cost would depend on the source of procurement at the time of replacement. It should be treated as foreign exchange cost if it is known that the machinery will have to be imported for its replacement. With the

This content downloaded from 202.41.10.30 on Fri, 31 Oct 2014 10:19:11 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions